DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 578 JC 960 313

AUTHOR Schwandt, Linda
TITLE An Investigation of the Organizational Factors that Foster Academic Vitality, Commitment, and Innovation among Two Year College Occupational Faculty.
PUB DATE Feb 96
NOTE 8p.; In: The Olympics of Leadership: Overcoming Obstacles, Balancing Skills, Taking Risks. Proceedings of the Annual International Conference of the National Community College Chair Academy (5th, Phoenix, AZ, February 14-17, 1996); see JC 960 276.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Community Colleges; Curriculum Development; *Faculty College Relationship; *Faculty Development; *Faculty Workload; *Job Satisfaction; *Organizational Climate; Productivity; Professional Development; *Teacher Improvement; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Wisconsin Technical College System

ABSTRACT

The need to respond to changing student clientele, new educational technologies, and increasing demands to do more with fewer resources presents serious challenges for two-year college faculty and can negatively effect faculty vitality and commitment. Faculty vitality, however, has been shown to be significantly related to the vitality and well-being of educational institutions, particularly in times of change. Research conducted in the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) found that vitality, commitment, and innovation in two-year college faculty were related to the following four elements: (1) commitment to teaching and learning; (2) initiative in curriculum development; (3) initiative in the professional teaching role; and (4) professional development activities pursued through credit courses, working in the professional field, participating in college and department committees, or taking on non-teaching assignments. Organizational factors determined in the research to enhance faculty job satisfaction and productivity included adequate financial compensation, shared values with the institution and variety in work role, administrative support, and appropriate workload. Moreover, for faculty in the WTCS, these elements tended to be interrelated, with, for example, adequate compensation associated with shared values and appropriate workload. Instructional administrators must be aware of faculty's needs and concerns and their relationship to faculty's generative activities in curriculum and professional development. (TGI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 394 578

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS THAT FOSTER ACADEMIC VITALITY, COMMITMENT, AND INNOVATION AMONG TWO YEAR COLLEGE OCCUPATIONAL FACULTY

By

Linda Schwandt
Instructor, Social Science/Evaluation Coordinator
Western Wisconsin Technical College
La Crosse, WI

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

JC 960 313

Paper Presented at the
Fifth Annual International Conference for
Community & Technical College Chairs, Deans and Other Organizational Leaders
February 14 - 17, 1996
Phoenix/Mesa, Arizona

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ACADEMY
305

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
G. Filan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Linda Schwandt has taught psychology and human development at Western Wisconsin Technical College, La Crosse, Wisconsin since 1972. She has recently served as assistant to the Dean of General Education and is currently the college's Evaluation Coordinator. Linda has been an active member or co-chair of several statewide General Education task forces and subcommittees. She has a strong interest in professional development and has served as a mentor for several new faculty members as well as for an individual participating in the Wisconsin Technical College System Leadership Identification Program. She was instrumental in the establishment of a local leadership identification program at her college and is the chair of the college's Faculty Mentoring Committee. Linda has recently completed an Ed.D. in Educational Administration at the University of Minnesota. In addition, she is currently a participant in the Wisconsin Leadership Development Institute which is being provided by the National Community College Chair Academy.

An Investigation of the Organizational Factors that Foster Academic Vitality ,Commitment, and Innovation Among Community and Technical College Faculty

What current conditions give cause to investigating the relationship between organizational factors and the academic vitality, commitment, and innovation of two-year college faculty?

Many of the faculty currently teaching in two-year colleges are products of traditional educational methodology that emphasizes the teacher as the expert and the learners as passive receivers of knowledge or skills training. Often, particularly in two-year institutions, faculty came from the ranks of skilled workers employed in business and industry. Others had been secondary school faculty or were new graduates of four-year institutions when they began teaching (London, 1980). As products of their past educational experiences, faculty members undertook their teaching assignments using pedagogy that was similar to what they had observed their own professors using (Alfred & Linder, 1992).

While traditional pedagogy may have been acceptable in the past, it no longer adequately meets the needs of today's diverse adult learners, their future employers, or the greater society. Interest and support for new, innovative, and more effective teaching strategies exists today at all levels of higher education. The changing student clientele, the increasing educational technology available to faculty combined with the demand to do more with fewer resources, present a number of challenges to faculty. Increasingly under scrutiny is the effectiveness of the teaching methods that many of today's faculty have been prepared for and are accustomed to using (Clark & Lewis, 1985).

As more is understood about how adults learn and what types of teaching strategies are most effective, it is imperative that the faculty of a college continues to grow in its knowledge and use of new teaching methods. In addition, in a two-year college where many of the faculty members teach technical skills as part of an occupational program, they are faced with continually learning new skills and attempting to comprehend rapidly changing technology. If these occupational programs provided by two-year colleges are to remain effective, faculty must be generative; that is they must be future-oriented and willing to learn and use new techniques.

Coincidental with this growing awareness of the need for changes in education, the cohort of faculty that was hired during the years of significant growth in higher education has reached mid-life and mid-career. Although retirements are beginning to occur, many of these members of the faculty have ten or more years to teach before they retire

(AACJC, 1988). While faculty, particularly in two-year colleges, claim to get significant job satisfaction from teaching, there are conflicting data to suggest that relatively few of these faculty members are engaging in change and innovation in their teaching behavior or making significant efforts to increase their knowledge bases (Palmer, 1994).

Several causes for the lack of job satisfaction, vitality, commitment, and innovation of higher education faculty have been posited. In most institutions there is a decline in financial resources in a time of increased demand for services. In addition, in some institutions faculty feel that they are uninvolved in the decisions influencing the use of these limited resources (Alfred & Linder, 1992). Increasingly, faculty are aware that the student clientele and its academic and personal needs are becoming more diverse. This diversity is often reflected in lowered academic skill and less commitment to learning than most faculty are accustomed to (Baldwin, 1982). The extent of this change in students may be particularly evident in two-year colleges which frequently maintain open enrollment policies (Cohen & Brawer, 1989).

Leaders in higher education understand that the work environment, and the management of it, influence the behavior of the people who work in it. Keller, recognized that although institutions of higher education are in the "people business," they have "paid relatively little attention to the quality and productivity of their people" (1983, p. 64). He suggested that each organizational must determine "what is central for the health, growth, and quality of the organization" (1983, p. 75). Keller (1983) provided an explanation of the components of management of higher education that has four parts. These four elements are administration to provide and coordinate the activities of the college; management to "see that the right things are done" (1983, p. 123); leadership to cause people in the organization to act; and governance to establish organizational policy. His assumption was that organizational leaders effectively employing these four components of management will improve the organization and consequently improve the work of the people in it.

The concept of faculty vitality appears to be a significant one in determining the vitality and well-being of organizations, including educational institutions, particularly in times of change. According to Richard L. Alfred of the University of Michigan,

> The smart and successful community college faculty and staff will invent their own future knowing that the college is a dynamic organization involving forces of continuity and change. The lucky ones will manage to scramble and adjust when push comes to shove. The rest will struggle behind the pack. Some won't make it. The challenges for community colleges and the faculty

and staff within them are complex and there are not easy answers (November, 1995).

What are the dimensions of academic vitality, commitment, and innovation in two-year college faculty?

A study conducted in the Wisconsin Technical College System found that vitality, commitment, and innovation in two-year college occupational faculty is defined by four areas of professional activity. These areas are:

1. commitment to teaching and learning, characterized by the faculty member's interest in and attempts at keeping courses up-to-date through curriculum modification, the addition of computer applications to a course, updating course syllabi, changing teaching methodology to meet the needs of current students, and advising student organizations;
2. initiative in curriculum development, usually in the form of modification of existing courses or programs so that they are up-to-date and can meet the needs of students and employers;
3. initiative in professional role, which often involves trying new pedagogy and taking risks in teaching, as well as recruiting students to their program, maintaining contacts with business and industry, being active in professional organizations, attending seminars and conferences, and serving as a mentor for a new faculty member; and
4. professional development activities often pursued through credit courses, working in their professional field, participating in college and department committees, or taking on non-teaching assignments.

Faculty who are vital, committed, and innovative in their professional role often involve themselves in a variety of professional activities. These professional activities, when considered together, suggest a state of academic generativity in which the faculty member is future-oriented, willing to accept and initiate change, and committed to the professional role and the institution.

What organizational factors appear to enhance the dimensions of academic generativity in two-year college faculty?

The data acquired in the colleges of the WTCS provide four organizational factors that are valued by faculty and appear to enhance their job satisfaction as well as the professional behaviors that characterize academic generativity. These factors are:

1. adequate financial compensation, including both salary and fringe benefits and financial support for faculty responsibilities beyond the classroom;
2. shared values with the institution and variety in work role, most often reflected in administrators who show an interest in and value what

faculty are doing as well as opportunities to vary their work role and responsibilities occasionally;

3. administrative support which includes communication with faculty, knowledge of faculty worklife, appreciation for faculty contributions, support and funding for professional development activities, and support for innovative teaching and program development; and

4. appropriate workload, which takes into consideration the increasing non-teaching responsibilities instructors have beyond their teaching load, including completing paperwork, taking on committee assignments, gaining expertise in new teaching techniques and technology, and preparing new classroom activities.

Faculty relate adequate financial compensation with shared values and variety in work role as well as with appropriate workload. This suggests that faculty do not value financial compensation in isolation from other organizational factors. Appropriate workload is also correlated with administrative support. Faculty perceive that the degree of support they receive from their administrators is associated with the teaching schedule and other work assignments they are given.

Why is the relationship between faculty academic generativity and organizational factors important?

Instructional administrators are the environmental catalysts and reinforcers of faculty's generative activities in curriculum development and professional development. It is important to faculty to have administrators who are aware of their needs and concerns. Faculty respond to a knowledgeable administrator by participating more in curriculum development and pursuing more professional development.

Colleges concerned about institutional effectiveness will want to create a working environment that will enhance the vitality, commitment, and innovativeness faculty. Faculty see a relationship between appropriate workload and their involvement in professional development.

Faculty believe that the time required of them beyond their teaching schedules is a probable cause of burnout. In the face of rapidly changing technology, colleges specializing in the education of technicians hoping for employment in businesses and industries that use the latest technology must take aggressive steps to meet the challenge of assisting their faculty to have adequate time in their work schedule to stay up-to-date.

The Challenge:
How will you, the academic administrator, in the face of continual change, provide an organizational environment that will enhance the vitality, commitment, and innovation of your faculty as you work together to bridge the gap between your institution's aspirations and resources?

Resources:

Alfred, R. L. (1995, November). Changing faculty roles in changing institutions. Paper presented at the Eighth Annual Faculty Development Institute, Ann Arbor, MI.

Alfred, R. L., & Linder, V. (1992, September). Empowering faculty through redefined work roles. In New Directions for Community Colleges, 79, 49-59. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Baldwin, R. G. (1982). Fostering faculty vitality: options for institutions and administrators. Administrator's Update, 4, 1-5.

Clark, S. M., & Lewis, D. R. (Eds.). (1985). Faculty vitality and institutional productivity: critical perspectives for higher education. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (1989). The American community college (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Commission on the Future of Community College. (1988). Building communities, a vision for a new century. Washington, DC: American Association of Community and Junior Colleges.

Keller, G. (1983). Academic strategy: the management revolution in American higher education. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

London, H. B. (1980). In between: the community college teacher. In J. L. Ratcliff (Ed.), ASHE reader on community colleges (pp. 233-239). Needham Heights, MA: Ginn Press.

Palmer, J. C. (1994). Faculty practices and attitudes as teachers and scholars: a review of research. In Baker, G. A. (Ed.), A handbook on the community college in America. (pp. 423-435). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.